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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NAIROBI 000516

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SUBJECT: Somalia -- Former PM Gedi Concerned about Debt, Reputation

Classified by PolOff Mitch Benedict for Reasons 1.4 (b, d)

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Summary  
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¶1. (C) SE Yates met with former Prime Minister Ali Mohamed Gedi February 12 to review current developments in Somalia and the status of Gedi's asylum request. Gedi spent considerable time spinning self-serving refutations of allegations that while Prime Minister he engaged in corrupt practices and misuse of funding. Gedi painted a picture of a man without means, hounded by creditors and forced to sell off possessions and property. However, we view Gedi's efforts to cleanse his tattered name as nothing more than a thinly veiled attempt to get the USG to squeeze money out of the Saudis on his behalf. He claimed he can no longer stay in Nairobi, and he asked for immediate assistance. End Summary.

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It's all Yusuf's Fault  
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¶2. (C) In a wide ranging meeting February 12, former Somalia Prime Minister Gedi told SE Yates that he wanted to clear his name, discuss his status in Kenya, and review the current situation in Somalia. Most of his monologue consisted of an effort to rehabilitate his reputation, and much of the blame fell on President Yusuf. Gedi said his trouble with Yusuf began the day of his appointment. He claimed Yusuf told him on November 4, 2004 at the Intercontinental Hotel in Nairobi that he never wanted to be President. Yusuf allegedly said he had decided a Hawiye should be president, and he would be prime minister, which is why he supported strong executive powers being invested in the position of prime minister. However, because the Hawiye split and could not unify behind a presidential nominee, Yusuf took the presidency and offered the prime minister position to Gedi. Gedi told Yusuf he would "work for the people of Somalia under his leadership." His lack of total fealty to Yusuf marked the beginning of his problems with the President.

¶3. (C) Claiming the European Commission Office in Nairobi is staffed by "crooks" whose job is to misinform, Gedi said he was "misunderstood" by many partners while he was in office. Parrying whatever allegations there may have been against him, Gedi fingered Yusuf for numerous financial shenanigans. For example, when the Chinese came looking for oil concessions and bearing a blank check for \$1 million Yusuf insisted, and secured, the check made out in the name of his son. When Saudi Arabia gave the TFG \$32 million for the National Reconciliation Congress (NRC), Yusuf demanded that Gedi obtain \$10 million in cash rather than having the money transferred into a TFG account in Jeddah. Also, according to Gedi, Yusuf went twice to Saudi Arabia in 2005 and 2006 to discuss Saudi financial assistance to Somalia. Eventually a \$197 million dollar package was agreed to, but has never materialized (except for the \$32 million for the NRC) because of Yusuf's desire simply to obtain cash.

14. (C) Gedi identified Salim Aliyow Ibrow as a key agent in diverting government resources to Yusuf and his family. Ibrow, who was the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Culture and Higher Education in the last Gedi government, is the current Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Justice and Religious Affairs in the cabinet of Prime Minister Hussein. Gedi claimed that over a twelve day period in September 2007, when he was sick in Nairobi, Acting PM Ibrow signed off on nearly \$27 million in questionable expenditures from the Saudi money, including \$8 million for Ali Mahdi. The money, which was supposed to go to the NRC, was divided between Yusuf (\$6 million) and Mahdi (\$2 million). The President, according to Gedi, has no authority to expend government money, yet 90 percent of the Saudi money was diverted to Yusuf. In a period when civil servants had not been paid for seven months, Gedi arranged for a \$1.2 million payment in October to parliament "out of my money."

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Gedi the Reconciliator  
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15. (C) When the NRC closed and 350 delegates went to Saudi Arabia and signed a commitment to enact the resolutions, the TFG also agreed to meet with the opposition. However, according to Gedi, the next day Yusuf refused, saying he would not meet with "terrorists." Gedi then went to Djibouti, and after some negotiation he succeeded in bringing members of the Hawiye/Abgal opposition with him to Mogadishu. They met with the President and said they were prepared to work toward a political dialogue. However, the President said "you are all Hawiye and you do not want reconciliation."

16. (C) Gedi next allegedly met with Abdi Qassim and others who assisted him to meet with the Hawiye Leadership Council (HLC), which represented the views of many Hawiye who were opposed to the TFG.

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Again, Gedi's purpose was to promote reconciliation. He claimed to have met Ahmed Diriye, the HLC spokesman, on October 8, his last day in Mogadishu. Diriye reportedly told Gedi the HLC was ready to work with the TFG. However, "the next day in Baidoa the fight against me intensified," said Gedi, until October 29 when he resigned. While everyone pointed at Gedi as the obstacle to reconciliation, the reality, according to Gedi, is that Yusuf and his family "are very good at killing you with their words" when it was them all along who undermined all his efforts at reconciliation.

17. (C) Gedi views Yusuf as bent on revenge. According to Gedi, Yusuf's answer to opposition is "we will destroy them, they are all al Qaeda," and Yusuf believes the country should be governed by a Darod regime. Clearly implying the TFG as led by President Yusuf, Gedi said "those harassing, looting, and killing are engaged in revenge politics, and revenge politics is very dangerous." Gedi recounted how Somalia's first president need only say "he is a criminal" in order to have a man removed. Siad Barre would get rid of a man by labeling him as "anti-revolutionary," and Yusuf has learned that he can eliminate opposition by labeling them as al-Qaeda. Gedi conceded there are some al-Qaeda elements in Somalia, "but we know them." Those labeled by Yusuf as al-Qaeda are not al-Qaeda, "but political opposition, mainly Hawiye."

18. (C) Comment: We could not help but notice that now out of office Gedi's comments on Yusuf, his intentions, and his views on the opposition, could have just as easily been made by Mohamed Uluso (Ayr political leader based in Nairobi), Asha Elmi (former MP and civil society leader), or even Sheikh Sharif (former Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Council of Islamic Courts). End Comment.

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Generally Pessimistic  
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19. (C) Gedi implied he is in touch with the Ethiopians, who are very frustrated over developments in Somalia. Two days prior to our meeting Gedi said he received a group of 17 Puntland businessmen who complained about Puntland government officials interfering in trade and commerce for personal gain. In the Juba regions Gedi said things

are worse than ever, with Islamic extremists threatening whatever semblance of legitimate government that may exist. "90 percent of the country is not under our control," said Gedi, and in Juba no one is in control. The Asmara group, according to Gedi, will announce an administration for Merka in the next couple weeks. And, of course said Gedi, there is already a conflict between Yusuf and PM Hussein.

¶10. (C) Asked what should be done, Gedi said he has advised the PM to minimize any potential for conflict with the President, and never to allow a cabinet meeting to take place when he is not in the country. Gedi urged the USG to use its influence to support the PM as a strong actor independent of the President. He also said we should support the immediate establishment of local administrations. Particularly in the Jubas, he said, local communities need to form administrative bodies as a means to establish security.

¶11. (C) With regard to a federal division of the country, Gedi insisted the country would be best served by five states, with Benadir as a special region, and the sooner these federal regions are established the better. Gedi told us when he left office a draft constitution was already completed. He claimed he hired experts, including constitutional lawyers, and set them to work with the constitutional commission, which consisted of seven Somalis, three of whom were from the diaspora. He repeated his call for international experts who could facilitate the process, and said with "\$50,000 and two months" they could review what has been drafted.

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Make the Saudis Pay  
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¶12. (C) Gedi said several times that security is not his concern. Rather, he claimed he can no longer stay in Nairobi because he and his wife are being hounded by creditors several times daily. The TFG, as part of his resignation, agreed to honor Gedi's debts incurred as Prime Minister. However, his personal debts remain large and unpaid. His wife recently sold "a half kilo" of gold, and he sold a farm in Afgoye. He has asked the Saudi King for assistance, and he has been assured by Seyoum Mesfin, Foreign Minister of Ethiopia, that he would also petition the Saudis on Gedi's behalf. "They can help me," he told us, and he asked the USG to also weigh in on his behalf.

¶13. (C) Gedi claimed he is good friends with Tanzanian President Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete, who offered him a house, car, driver, and security in Zanzibar. Allegedly the Ethiopians have also similarly offered to provide Gedi with housing and accommodation. However, Gedi said, the issue is not housing or security, rather how he can

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pay off his debts. In that regard, Gedi was very concerned about an article by an independent journalist that appeared on the web. The article alleged that the U.S. had purchased a home in Los Angeles and arranged a university position for Gedi. Such information would only serve to embolden his creditors, and Gedi was working to counter the article.

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Bio Note  
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¶14. (C) Contrary to popular belief, Gedi claimed, his father never was in Addis Ababa, nor did he have a personal relationship of any degree with Meles Zenawi. In addition, Gedi said there are rumors that after his appointment as Prime Minister on November 3, 2004 he went immediately to Addis Ababa before proceeding to Mogadishu. He insisted he went directly from Nairobi to Mogadishu. Lastly, Gedi says there are rumors out there that his wife is Tigrayan, when in fact she is "100 percent Somali."

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Comment  
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¶15. (C) Gedi remains a player within Hawiye circles and he makes no effort to hide his presidential ambitions. Nur Hassan Hussein was

also mentioned to us as Gedi's candidate to succeed him, and Gedi implied he was in frequent contact with now PM Hussein. However, we view Gedi's efforts to cleanse his tattered name as nothing more than a thinly veiled attempt to get the USG to squeeze money out of the Saudis on his behalf. If Gedi was even fractionally as engaged and supportive of reconciliation as he imagines himself to have been, we would have known it -- and we did not. Likewise, if Gedi was working so feverishly at reconciliation, but being thwarted at every turn by President Yusuf, one has to wonder why he never hinted at any of this while he was in office. While elements of truth undoubtedly are intermingled in Gedi's story, we view his intentions as self-serving, and we will continue to monitor his efforts at rehabilitation and "reconciliation."

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